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Description

Variable field bus coupling with long coupling length, particularly for mobile operator control and monitoring devices

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The invention relates to a variable connection of mobile data units to a field bus, more specifically of mobile handheld controllers. These may be used, for example, in industrial applications for controlling and operating production plant and machinery.

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In modern industrial plant, particularly automated production facilities, mobile operator control and monitoring systems are required. These are not tied to a specific site, but can be plugged in at changeable locations as and when required. Moreover, in the case of industrial systems, field buses must be regarded as the standard for networked computer systems. It is therefore important for the user to have an easy means of connecting mobile operator control and monitoring devices to field buses.

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The invention relates to an advantageous embodiment of so-called "access points" which are used as data system docking stations for the mobile operator control and monitoring devices, also known as BuB systems, to a networked process control system.

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In the case of conventional industrial field buses, for connecting equipment such as peripherals, operator control and monitoring devices, central units and many more besides to the field bus, long spur lines must be avoided. Figure 1 shows a standard setup for a conventional connection of a device to a field bus, said device being connected to said field bus via a line driver and a spur line. The spur line must be kept as short as possible in order not to jeopardize data transmission on the bus. The line driver is connected to a field bus controller via

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three signal cables. The elements of the unit in question are connected to the field bus controller. These elements are not shown in Figure 1 for the sake of clarity. There is provided an incoming and an outgoing signal cable for "Receive data" and "Transmit data" respectively. It is also possible to monitor the data traffic on the field bus via the incoming signal cable. For transmitting data from the field bus controller over the outgoing signal cable, activation of the line driver via an additional control signal is additionally necessary.

Figure 2 again shows in detail a section of Figure 1 in the area of the spur line, the two connector plugs for the line driver at the input and output of the field bus being shown. The spur line between the two connector plugs and the line driver must be kept as short as possible.

The invention will now be explained in greater detail with reference to exemplary embodiments. These are illustrated in the Figures briefly described below:

Figure 1 shows the design of a field bus connection according to the prior art,

Figure 2 shows a detail from Figure 1 in the area of the spur line,

Figure 3 shows a field bus connection according to the invention,

Figure 4 shows an exemplary field bus equipped with a plurality of access points according to the invention,

Figure 5 shows an exemplary implementation of the data link based on differential signal transmission,

Figure 6 shows an advantageous embodiment for present detection of a BuB device connected to an access point.

Figure 3 shows a connection of a mobile device to a field bus according to the invention, the mobile operator control and monitoring device being connected to the field bus via a data link and an access point, the spur line indeed having a correspondingly short line length between field bus and the line driver located in the access point. An access point can also be termed a coupling unit. However, because of the advantageous embodiment of the mobile operator control and monitoring device on the one hand and of the access point on the other, the intervening data link can have considerably longer line lengths e.g. in excess of 10 meters. The coupling according to the invention as shown in Figure 3 can also be termed "remote bus access".

The particularly advantageous lengthening of the data link is achieved according to the invention by interposing a level converter in each of the three signal lines for "Control signal", "Transmit data" and "Receive data" both at the mobile operator control and monitoring end and at the access point end. A control signal fed out by the field bus controller in the mobile operator control and monitoring device is therefore converted by a first level converter, converted back again by a second level converter after transmission over the signal link and only then fed to the line driver in the access point. In the same manner a pair of level converters is interposed in the signal line provided for "Transmit data" and in the signal line provided for "Receive data". In this way the mobile BuB device can be connected to the field bus via a very long data link, whereas only the access point is connected to the field bus via a correspondingly short spur line.

Into each of the three signal lines there is therefore inserted an additional point-to-point transmission link allowing physical decoupling of the mobile BuB device from the access point placed in the immediate proximity of the field bus.

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In addition to the considerable lengthening of the signal line path over the data link, the arrangement according to the invention has the additional advantage that a BuB device can be dynamically plugged and unplugged again at an access point without adversely affecting data transmission on the field bus. In addition, it is particularly advantageous that virtually any number of access points can be distributed over a field bus.

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By way of example, Figure 4 shows a corresponding system configuration wherein a field bus is fed by a process logic control PLC, i.e. more specifically an industrial control. To the field bus there are connected a plurality of peripheral devices which have functions required in the relevant operating environment of the plant configuration illustrated. In many cases intelligent I/O modules are involved which enable data to be transferred to a connected installation unit. For the sake of clarity, no installation equipment is shown in Figure 4. Moreover, an additional PC is connected to the field bus by way of example. This can assume the function of a control computer for performing, for example, diagnostics, archiving and connection e.g. to the Internet. Access points AP disposed in a distributed manner and according to the invention are connected to the field bus. It is now possible for a user to connect a BuB device to one of the access points as required. In a large industrial plant it is therefore no longer absolutely necessary to place stationary BuB devices in a distributed manner in order to ensure reliable operator control and monitoring of all the peripheral devices and installation units.

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Instead a BuB can be connected to the access point AP in closest proximity to equipment to be controlled or monitored.

Advantageously the data link between two level converters in a signal  
5 line is in the form of a differential transmission link. By way of  
example, Figure 5 shows a differential signal transmission link of this  
kind for a signal line. This usually consists of a line pair in each  
case. In each signal line there is therefore interposed a point-to-  
point connection which allows highly interference-free transmission of  
10 data on the line pair. The critical factor for transmission quality is  
the differential signal level and not the absolute value of the  
individual signals. Thus interference coupled onto the two lines of the  
data link between the level converters usually cancels itself out.

15 Because of the invention according to the invention, a mobile BuB  
device can therefore be connected to different access points AP. Via  
so-called present detection at each AP it can be detected where the  
mobile BuB device has been connected. A possible implementation of  
present detection of this kind is illustrated in Figure 6. For this  
20 purpose each access point AP is connected to the higher-order PLC via  
an additional signal line. This can detect via this preferably digital  
line whether a BuB device is connected to the access point AP. In  
addition, the PLC can also transmit via the present detection system a  
selection of views to the particular BuB device connected, which are  
25 offered to the BuB device at the relevant access point.